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## Latin Prose Composition as a Fun, Creative, and Differentiated Activity.

It is only while *creating with the language* that students have an opportunity to build toward higher levels of proficiency. In addition, it is during creative language practice that the most informative error-correction feedback can be given, since this type of practice allows students to try out their hypotheses about the target language in a natural way. (Alice Omaggio Hadley, 107)

**Fun and Creative:** Students are able almost immediately to express, in their own words, their understanding of a Latin story. Students can then use the newly-acquired vocabulary and grammar to create their own variations on the story, or even their own original narratives. Because students care about what they are writing, they want their compositions not only to be correct (accuracy), but good (style). A “writer’s workshop” environment of collaboration will encourage students to take risks, make mistakes, seek help, and make progress.

**Differentiated:** Students are encouraged to work at their own level of comfort and proficiency. As students venture further into free composition, they can give voice to their own unique perspectives on the material. In addition, teachers can evaluate these assignments using many different criteria, based on the learning goals, and the students’ needs.

**Flexible:** Focus on composition and written proficiency can support any aspect or step of the language-learning process: reading comprehension, grammar, syntax, word forms, spoken language skills, communicative use of language, vocabulary acquisition, *et cetera*. Furthermore, this activity easily fits into any textbook or method, and can be used as a formative or summative assessment.

**Supportive:** Teachers can provide as much structure as students need, and can then remove that structure as students progress, moving toward the goal of individual expression *in the target language*.

**Natural:** Takes students through a process similar to their work in English (or L1).

## **Summary of presentation:**

based on actual presentation and Q & A.

Many teachers at this conference have spoken about having students use the language in more active and creative ways, including writing. Many teachers also share the goal of increasing their students' proficiency in writing in the language, and not simply translating English sentences into Latin. What is unclear, however, is how to make this happen, especially in the very beginning. These are questions which I asked myself while planning my semester of student teaching. One of my goals for my students was to make them proficient and comfortable with the process of writing in the target language. One activity in particular generated very positive results, for students very quickly began to write relatively large quantities of prose, and without anxiety.

I have laid out a few basic steps by which students can acquire new vocabulary and grammatical forms, and then reinforce this knowledge through active use.

1. Begin with a reading. The reading my students used was "Avarus." from the Cambridge Latin Course (included in this packet). The students had spent at least one class period and one evening at home reading and understanding the story.
2. Once I had checked for basic comprehension in class, I handed them a vocabulary chart (included in this packet), divided into columns based on type of word. In addition, I filled it out with vocabulary from the story.
3. At the top is a simple example, which I went through with the students. Teachers may want to take students through multiple examples of this exercise before having them do it, either in groups or on their own.
4. Then I had students work together in pairs, looking only at the chart, and making use of their memory of the events of the story (which we had just gone through together), and write out a few sentences summarizing what happened in the story. I would go around the room, helping students and making clarifications of the assignment.
5. After ten or so minutes, I asked groups to provide sentences, reading them aloud, while I wrote them on the board/overhead projector. After a few examples, we had a summary of the entire story in 5 or 6 sentences.
6. For homework, the students could write their own individual summaries of the story. Or you could give them leeway to change the story and provide their own alternate endings using either the vocab in the book, or their own favorite words (which they should be encouraged to add to their list). Specifications to this assignment might include a required minimum number of sentences, and/or specific constructions that must be used.

Once students are comfortable with the concept, you can give them the same sheet, but without words filled in (or only certain words filled in), and have them fill in new, difficult, interesting, etc. words. This allows them to take charge of their learning of vocabulary, as they must be aware of what they do and do not know (metacognition). In the beginning, it is good to retain the categories of subject and direct object, as they are still learning the difference between nominative and accusative. In addition, this is in line with most reading method texts: students learn new vocabulary in context, and then later learn to recognize the commonality of the root and apply the different endings. For now, it is better for *puella* and *puellam* to be

in different columns. There is a lot of flexibility here regarding what the teacher includes, depending on what concepts the teacher wants to emphasize.

Incentive to fill out the sheet: I gave in-class assessments, and the students were allowed to bring their sheets to those assessments, provided there was no English on them (nor are they allowed simply to write a story on the sheet beforehand). This encourages the students to be thorough, because they know it will help them on the assessment. I often had composition as one part of a test, or a small quiz in which they had to summarize a reading, or write a story (on a given theme or a theme of their choice).

This sheet can then be used instead of (or in conjunction with) traditional vocabulary lists for each chapter. With this activity, students have a complete vocabulary for each chapter, produced by them, which they can use to review and reinforce their knowledge as they produce compositions based on the words and phrases which they have included. It is also a place for students to compile words which are of interest to them, whether they find it in the text, or other sources (dictionary, classmates, teacher, internet, etc).

Structure and support are most important in these first steps of the composition process. For students who take to it, they may be allowed to stray from the assignments (i.e. write about other subjects and use new vocabulary). But some students will not feel comfortable so soon. In the beginning, some students may seem to be doing nothing more than re-writing what they have been reading. There is nothing wrong with this, as imitation is a natural first step in the learning process, and by imitating the good prose in their readings, they are still learning something. Offering these options is central to the success of this exercise of ALL students. For users of Cambridge, see Alice Yoder's workbook, listed in the "further reading" section of this packet.

Assessment: Again, very flexible. Teachers should assess for those skills they want to focus on in these exercises. A rubric covering vocabulary, endings, sentence structure, or emphasizing any one of these would be appropriate. With my students, I graded very easily, in order to encourage them to be comfortable with the writing process, only marking off for gross errors which showed a lack of studying and/or preparation. These composition exercises were often only a part of larger assessments.

The examples of student work I have included show well how students are struggling in the beginning, often with mistakes, to communicate a story. These are first drafts, but I always allow students to revise their work, for this is how they correct their errors. You can also see how eager they were to tell their own version of events, or their own story altogether. Students in general enjoyed these assignments, and were in fact requesting composition assignments on upcoming assessments. In the end, students have an impressive body of work which they can share with their classmates and parents. This can also easily be turned into a composition portfolio (or added to a more general portfolio assessment).

By focusing on the content of what they are writing from the start, form becomes a means for students to convey their ideas. Grammar as a means to a meaningful end is far less intimidating than grammar as an end in itself. When students have an interest in communicating something to a reader, they care more about correct use of language, and they take pride in what they are writing—they want it to be good.

This activity is not meant to replace any other activity (except perhaps the traditional practice of translation from English to Latin). It can fit into any curriculum, for teachers can use it as much or as little as they like. In addition, this is not only for beginners in the language, though it has been presented in the context of the Latin I classroom. One teacher mentioned how this activity could easily be adapted for the AP curriculum. In this way, students could collect new vocab on their sheets, and then use the vocabulary

to produce their own Latin summaries of the AP readings. This is an effective alternative assessment to simple translation into English.

If you have any questions, or would like to share your results, please let me know via email:  
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## Avarus (CLC Stage 6)

Duō fūrēs ōlim ad vīllam contendēbant. in vīllā mercātor habitābat.  
mercātor erat senex et avārus. avārus multam pecūniam habēbat.  
fūrēs, postquam vīllam intrāvērunt, ātrium circumspectāvērunt.

“avārus,” inquit fūr, “est sōlus. avārus servum nōn habet.” tum  
fūrēs tablīnum intrāvērunt. avārus clāmāvit et ferōciter pugnāvit, sed  
fūrēs senem facile superāvērunt.

“ubi est pecūnia, senex?” rogāvit fūr.

“servus fidēlis pecūniam in cubiculō custōdit,” inquit senex.

“tū servum fidēlem nōn habēs, quod avārus es,” clāmāvit fūr. tum  
fūrēs cubiculum petīvērunt.

“pecūniam videō,” inquit fūr. fūrēs cubiculum intrāvērunt, ubi  
pecūnia erat, et pecūniam intentē spectāvērunt. sed ēheu! ingēns  
serpēns in pecūniā iacēbat. fūrēs serpentem timēbant et ē villā  
celeriter festīnāvērunt.

in vīllā avārus rīdēbat et serpentem laudābat.

“tū es bonus servus. numquam dormīs. pecūniam meam semper  
servās.”

**Magister Piazza****Lingua Latina I Latin composition word list.**

Example:

Verbs	Subjects	Direct Objects	Prepositional phrases	Adjectives and Adverbs
contendebant	fures		Ad villam	Olim duo

duo fures olim ad villam contendebant

Using vocabulary words from the rest of “Avarus,” write 5 or more sentences in Latin describing the events of the story.

In the list below, the verbs and nouns already have the right endings. Feel free to change those endings to fit your sentences.

Verbs	Subjects	Direct Objects	Prep. phrases	Adj's and adv's
est habet custodit petiverunt superaverunt video inquit es intraverunt clamavit pugnavit iacebat timebant ridebat laudabat	mercator avarus fures pecunia senex serpens	pecuniam villam atrium servum (fidelem) tablinum fures serpentem	in villa in cubiculo in pecunia e villa	multam ferociter fidelis facile intente ingens celeriter optimus meus, a, um semper

Lingua Latina I

Magister Piazza

Composition word list for chapter \_\_\_\_ (table should be formatted horizontally on page)

nouns		verbs	Adverbs and adjectives	Other words and phrases
			<b>Prepositional Phrases:</b>	

Examples of student compositions.

### **First composition assignment, Latin 1, week 5. First drafts.**

Multi amici Caecilium laudaverunt. Amici Caecilium laudaverunt quod Caecilius pavonem coxit. Clemens aberat. Clemens in leone erat. Cur Clemens in leone erat? Quod leone clemetem cenavit! Amici ad silvam festinaverunt. Amici Clementem audiverunt. Clemens erat in versipelle? Amicus centurionem vocavit. Centurio ad versipellem festinavit. "Ah!" versipellis dixit. "Clemens abest." "Clemens non est in versipelle!" amicus dixit.

Tunica urbem visitabat. Homines Urbis tunicam conspexit. Homines urbis tunicam superavit et, e urbis agitavit. Postquam, Grumio coxit XXXII pavones et homines urbis picturam pingebat. Tandem pictura erat ardens. Subito homines celebravi quod pictura erat ardens. Tum ursus picturam edivit et subito ursi sunt lapidea. "Eheu" diciverunt homines urbis. "Tunica erat umbra."

homines ambulabant per urbis. Caecilius erat in foro. Syphax et Felix quoque erant in foro, subito centurio forum intravit. "Magnus versipellis adest!" Omnes Pompeiiani ad centurionem ridebant. tum versipellis intrant foro. versipellis ululavit. maximus clamor accidit. en turba, versipellis virem conspexit. vir festinavit, sed versipellis superavit. versipellis virem ad ianua traxit. tum, Felix versipellem vidit. Felix currit et caught up with the werewolf. versipellem pulsavit et finally versipellis went away. Felix virem inspexit. virem erat Quintus.

### **Composition section of in-class quiz on CLC stage 7. Week 10**

Assignment: "Write a story using your vocabulary sheets. Be sure the forms of verbs and nouns are correct. You may write a continuation of your last story, or make up something new. I want to see at least 8 sentences."

Dominus servis vituperat quod servi non laborant. Serevi in horto sedent et cibus edunt. Servi cum poetâ et ancillâ rident. Ancilla pulchra est; sicut stella lucebat. Omne servi ancillam amant. Dominus dicit, "Festinate e horto et laborate! Grumio, coque cenam! Clemens, non ride!" Dominus melissam vidit et rogat, "quid tu facis, Melissa?" Melissa lacrimat et dicit, "Nihil facio, dominus. Ignosce mihi."

olim spectaculum erat in amphitheatro. omnes Pompeiani ad amphitheatrum ambulabant sed Grumio ad silvam festinavit. In silvâ, Grumio circumspexit. subito, poculum conspexit. prope poculum, mortuus vir est. Grumio virem inspexit. vir est Quintus. "ehui!" Grumio clamavit. Grumio lacrimabat, sed clamorem audivit. versipelliis aderat! Grumio versipellem processit. "me non terres" clamavit. versipellem pulsavit. Grumio erat iratus, sed versipellis Grumionem superavit. Grumionem necavit. versipellis ululavit.



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## **Annotated Bibliography**

The Cambridge Latin Course. Cambridge University Press.

This (in its 3<sup>rd</sup> edition) is the textbook I used during my student teaching, and forms the basis for the exercises I am presenting. For the 4<sup>th</sup> edition, Cambridge has removed nearly all of the “composition” (i.e. English to Latin translation) exercises on the view that they are not productive of better reading skills. This leaves room in the curriculum for creative composition activities.

Alice Omaggio Hadley *Teaching Language in Context*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Henle and Henle, 2001.

James F. Lee and Bill Vanpatten. *Making Communicative Language Teaching Happen*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. McGraw Hill, 2003.

These two books are considered to be the basic sources of methodology for all modern language teachers. Also very helpful to Latin teachers who want to take advantage of recent findings in the field of language acquisition. They provide many sample exercises and activities.

Luigi Miraglia. “Latino e Greco alla Prova: La verifica delle competenze nella didattica delle lingue classiche” *Docere* 1, 1 (2002) 23-33.

———. “Latino e Greco alla Prova: La verifica delle competenze nella didattica delle lingue classiche (Seconda parte) *Docere* 1, 2 (2002). 13-29.

In these two articles, Miraglia shows his method of teaching Latin composition through the description of pictures and texts. As the title indicates, assessment is central to these articles, and Miraglia includes samples of rubrics and student work. If you can read Italian, and are interested, I can mail you xeroxes, or email you scans.

Terence Tunberg and Milena Minkova. *Readings and Exercises in Latin Prose Composition*. Focus Publishing, 2004

The first in what will hopefully be a trend in Latin composition books which place less emphasis on English to Latin translation. Although too advanced for most high school students, many of the activities can easily be adapted for the pre-college classroom.

Alice Yoder. *Writing Your Own Latin Sentences*. workbook published by the North American Cambridge Classics Project, 2000.

Based on the composition activities from the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the CLC. I found this book after I had already begun my work with students, and our approaches are very similar. This book provides the structure that beginning students need.

## **Electronic Resources:**

Latin-BestPractices email group. Co-moderated by Robert Patrick and John Piazza.

Participants are encouraged to share their ideas on effective teaching strategies. In addition, the list has a growing database of materials, focus papers, and links posted by teachers.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/latin-bestpractices>